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Working Group I
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Land Resources: Deforestation

Conservation and Development of Forests

Guiding Principles for a Consensus on Forests

Report of the Secretary General of the Conference

INTRODUCTION

At the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development the Secretary-General of the Conference was requested 1/ to re-examine its work on document A/CONF.151/PC/27, in line with decision 1/14 of the first session of the Preparatory Committee, taking into consideration the various submissions made during the meetings of Working Group I and the Ad Hoc Subgroup on Forests, and as fully and as comprehensively as possible to analyse and address various elements related to forests.

1/ Doc: A/46/48 (Part I) Decision 2/13.

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It further requested the Secretary-General of the Conference to take due account in its further work in this area of the relevant paragraphs of the Bergen Declaration, the Tlatelolco Platform on Environment and Development and the Final Declaration adopted by the Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development for Asia and the Pacific, as well as the results of the Regional Conference for Africa, organized in accordance with section II, paragraph 13, of General Assembly resolution 44/228 of 22 December 1989 and decision I of the Preparatory Committee at its organizational session.

The Preparatory Committee outlined, inter-alia, seven principles for the further consideration at its third session leading to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

The Preparatory Committee also expressed that upon thorough assessment of the additional information to be presented by the Secretary-General of the Conference to its third session, Working Group I would be in a position to examine all steps towards and options (including, at least, taking into account the special situation and needs of developing countries, a non-legally binding authoritative statement of principles) for a global consensus on the management, conservation and development of all types of forests, either as a part of the proposed Earth charter or separately, while noting that the completion of this work may best be decided at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992.

Finally, the Preparatory Committee affirmed that the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development process was the most appropriate forum for conclusive decisions pertaining to global consensus on forests.

Drawing on the documents and decisions mentioned above as well as on the support of the members of the Working Party on Forest and the collaboration of several governmental and non-governmental organizations such as FAO, the WRI, ITTO, IUCN, UNESCO, the Secretary-General of the Conference presents a list of basic principles to be considered by the Preparatory Committee, at its third session in their deliberations related to an eventual consensus on forests.

Guiding Principles for a Consensus on Forests

These deliberations call for the attention of all developed and developing countries, benefiting from forest resources of their own and from those located in other regions of the world. as well as those from regions with little forest resources but which need to recover or establish trees and forests for the improvement of the quality of life of their people.

A global consensus on forests could take into consideration the following basic principles:

1. Global coverage

It should apply to all existing forests: austral, boreal, temperate, sub-tropical and tropical as well as to areas susceptible to be covered by forests.

2. Reaffirm sovereignty

It should reaffirm Principle 21 of the Stockholm Declaration (1972).

> Principle 21 reads: "States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental policies, and the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction."

3. Affirm stewardship

It could assert the need for stewardship of forest resources and forest lands in such a manner as to ensure the attainment and continued satisfaction of human needs for present and future generations.

4. Recognize common responsibility

It could provide for equitable sharing by the international community of the burden of forest conservation and development.

5. Promote integration

It could promote full integration of all aspects of environmental protection and social and economic development as they relate to forests and forest lands.

6. Strengthen framework for national efforts

It could provide a framework for increased national efforts including the development and strengthening of national policies, programmes and institutions for conservation and sustainable development of forests and forest lands.

7. Ensure sustainable management

It could promote and ensure the sustainable management of forests to meet present and future social, economic and cultural human needs such as for wood and wood products, food, fodder, medicine, fuel, shelter, recreation and landscape diversity while protecting forests against harmful effects of air pollution, fires, pests and diseases.

8. Recognize role of forests in climate

It could deal with the maintenance, restoration and enhancement of the ability of forests to act as sinks and reservoirs for carbon and other greenhouse gases known to affect the world's atmosphere and with the reduction of the contribution of deforestation and forest degradation to the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

9. Recognize the role of forest in maintaining biological diversity

It could provide for the conservation, maintenance, restoration and enhancement of the biological diversity of forested ecosystems, including genes, and species, in particular emphasizing the need to identify and protect selected areas of natural forest ecosystems (including old-growth forests) and the need to document where lacking, the biological resources of forests.

10. Underline the role of forests in soil and water conservation

It could recognize the vital role of forests in protecting highlands and mountain areas, watersheds and freshwater resources, for example in reducing floods and soil erosion, and maintaining the water cycles as a sustainable source of hydroelectric energy and for irrigation and urban use.

11. Deal with fuelwood and energy

It could endeavour to meet the demands for fuelwood for household and industrial needs in ways that avoid deforestation and degradation of forests.

12. Encourage reforestation and rehabilitation

It could provide for the maintenance and increase, in ecologically and socially sound ways, the total area and productivity of forests. It could address the rehabilitation and reforestation and, more generally, the reestablishment of trees and forests on unproductive, degraded and deforested lands.

13. Ascertain the recognition of forest dwellers, local communities and indigenous peoples rights

It could respect the rights and interests of forest dwellers, local peoples and indigenous communities who rely on forests to maintain their livelihood, social organization and/or cultural identity.

14. Consider the role of women

It could stress the vital role of women for the conservation and sustainable development of forests.

15. Promote Research and monitoring

It could encourage the revision, application and where appropriate the expansion of existing knowledge through research, inventory and monitoring on the biological, physical, social and economic components of forest resources and forest ecosystems and of the various uses of and threats to forests.

16. Develop and strengthen education and training

It could strengthen institutional capabilities in education and training, improve education in the science, technology, economics and social aspects of forests and forest management.

17. Guarantee access to information

It could provide guarantees for the full and open access to information and the decision-making process related to sustainable forest management.

18. Promote economic and trade policies

It could integrate forest conservation and sustainable development policies with economic and trade policies, eliminate, wherever practicable, subsidies and other governmental interventions which encourage deforestation and unsound forest practices and facilitate orderly and free international trade in forest products from sustainably managed forest resources.

19. Provide framework for international assistance

It could ensure a vital increase in international cooperation for policies and programmes aimed at forest conservation and sustainable development. Provide financial and technical assistance to help countries implement national, regional and international policies and programmes aimed at the conservation and sustainable development of forests.

It could consider the establishment of special funding arrangements to support sustainable management as well as the expansion of forests and other forms of vegetation cover.

20. Develop international institutional arrangements

It could provide for appropriate international institutional arrangements, taking into account those organizations and mechanisms already in existence, for the attainment of the objectives of the global consensus, including mechanism to monitor its implementation, to assess progress and to coordinate international action.

21. Ensure linkages with other instruments

It could complement and be coordinated with other international initiatives with implications for aspects of forestry, notably the climate change and biodiversity conventions and with existing conventions or treaties.

The above set of principles which has been developed on the basis of the deliberations of the second session of the Preparatory Committee are submitted to the third session for its consideration. The Preparatory Committee may wish, on the basis of these principles, to further examine steps towards a global consensus on the development, management and conservation of forests and forests lands.